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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BOSTON

DEPARTMENT OF DECORATIVE ARTS

European and American
Pewter

1920

EUROPEAN DECORATIVE ARTS

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Department of European Decorative
Arts Gallery Guide no. 5

EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN PEWTER

The origin of pewter seems to have been of considerable antiquity, but its discovery has not been attributed to any country. Latin writers speak of it frequently and fragments of Roman pewter dishes of the fourth and fifth centuries A. D. have been found in England.

Pewter is an alloy in which a large per cent of tin is combined with varying proportions of lead and other metals. It is an inexpensive material, soft and easily worked. Being fusible at a low temperature, it is not practical for cooking purposes, but it served many other domestic uses in England and on the Continent from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. Its soft gray color is particularly attractive against a background of dark wood such as the panelled oak rooms of English country houses furnished. The word "garnish", which we now use meaning "to decorate", was originally applied to a set of pewter comprising twelve platters, twelve dishes and twelve saucers. Thus when these were arranged on an oak dresser or sideboard the room was "garnished". It took several hundred pounds of pewter to supply an English kitchen in those days, and it is recorded that in one of our old Salem houses there were 453 pounds of pewter.

It was usual in England to rent pewter services for banquets and holiday occasions, and the richer craftsmen kept a supply on hand for that purpose. The nobles and even the king himself followed this custom. One of the first records of the practice is found in the account of the coronation of Edward I. of England in 1274. The dishes necessary for serving a meal at that period were not varied. A large platter or charger for the meat and vegetables, individual plates, drinking vessels, salts and spoons were the most important ones. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when living became more luxurious and ceremonious, a great number of new shapes came into use.

Very little of the English pewter was decorated, not being intended for ornament, as was so much of the continental ware, and the daily scouring would have soon worn off anything but the most simple mouldings. Gilding and painting applied to pewter was forbidden in England. The shapes, however, always followed those of the silver of the period, and some of the later punches imitated silver hall marks very closely. At an early date the church made laws forbidding the use

of pewter vessels in the Communion service, but the poverty of the churches, after a heavy demand for funds by the crown, periodically necessitated its use when the gold and silver vessels had been sent to the melting pot. But today almost no church pewter exists which dates before the Reformation.

England seems to have taken the lead in the making of pewter in the Middle Ages, probably because of the superior quality of the tin which came from her mines in Cornwall, famous throughout the world. Edward I. granted the pewterers' guild many privileges, and it was at first called the Craft or Mystery of Pewterers. Early in the seventeenth century the name was changed to the Company of Pewterers. A hall was built in the fifteenth century where an annual banquet and all business transactions took place. The Virgin was the Patroness of the Mystery; but the Yeomanry or Freeman had a separate organization called the Fraternity of St. Michael the Archangel.

The books and ordinances of the Guild give much interesting information about the life and customs of the period. Even the dress, toilet and behavior of the members were regulated and the

Wardens included charity to the poorer members among their many duties. Their rules aimed to protect the public from being cheated, as well as to safeguard the interests of the craftsmen.

Before a pewterer could set up business as a master, he had to serve six years as an apprentice, and then one more year, when his work was taken by his master to pay for his instruction. After submitting certain prescribed vessels to the Craft, he was given his "freedom". Next he registered his "touch" mark at the Company's Hall. Only a native born was allowed this privilege, and every effort was made to confine the trade to London, where it could be controlled to the exclusion of provincial and foreign workmen.

In York, in the sixteenth century, neglect to make and use a proper mark was punished by a monthly forfeit of fifty shillings and a fine for each unmarked piece; but the rules about marking do not seem to have been very carefully enforced, as we find as much unmarked as marked pewter. A great deal of pewter was made in the provinces in spite of the efforts of the Company to suppress its manufacture, and the marking of such pieces could not

be insured. In 1559 it became compulsory for each man to register his mark on the touch plate at the Company's Hall. Five of these touch plates are in existence, and reproductions of the punches are given in Malcolm Bell's "Old Pewter".

There were three grades of English pewter. "Sadware", i. e., plates and platters, were made of the best quality as they received the hardest use. Hollow ware was made from the second which contained antimony. "Trifle", the third quality, had a large proportion of antimony and was employed for public house vessels and small objects. Antimony made the metal hard but brittle, and is found in the later white metal or Britannia.

Gun metal moulds were used for making hollow ware, and, as these were expensive, the Company often owned them in common and the members were allowed to borrow them. This accounts for there being so little variety in shapes bearing the marks of different makers.

Wooden moulds were often used where only a few castings were to be made. Next to moulds the hammer was the most necessary tool to the pewterer, and its hitting face had to be kept free from scratches and brightly polished, or it would mark

the surface of the pewter. Until the eighteenth century the lathe was kept for special uses such as burnishing and finishing tankards or flagons, and the spiral marks left by it are often seen on the bottoms of such vessels. About 1750 it became the most important factor in the industry, and was used to finish all objects made in a mould. Soldering irons, a blow-pipe, gouges, chisels, etc., are some of the other necessary tools.

The weight of all wares was regulated and an X crowned originally indicated first quality. It is, however, also found on Scottish and European pewter. The rose crowned was the Company's mark, but that, too, lost its significance by being used as a private stamp and in Scotland.

On the Continent, especially in France and Germany, the early use of pewter vessels was confined to the Court, the nobility and church dignitaries who demanded more elaborate shapes than the English and great richness of decoration. François Briot (1550?-1615?) in France and Gaspar Enderlein (d. 1663) in Germany, whose work followed the style of Briot's, are two of the most noted producers of pewter in the "silver fashion" as it was called. The silversmiths at last became

alarmed at the fine quality of the pewter produced by these men and appealed for a law to prevent them from ever working in the precious metals.

Lille, Ghent, Nuremberg, Paris and Rouen were some of the important centres of the industry on the Continent. Bruges and Augsburg are also mentioned in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and Barcelona in the fifteenth century, but we know little of Spanish, Italian or Russian pewter and its makers. Porringers or bowls with two handles, salvers, mugs and cups, with the regulation vessels for religious use, seem to have been the most common shapes in early use on the Continent.

In Scotland the industry was late in developing because of the poverty of the country and the ease with which foreign pewter could be smuggled in. The Hammermen of St. Andrew, which included pewterers and all artisans who used the hammer except carpenters, plumbers and masons, were not organized until the fifteenth century. The downfall of the Catholic Church in 1560 and the establishment of the Presbyterian faith resulted in Scotland, as in England, in the destruction of all church vessels previous to that date.

There is a good deal of later Scottish Communion pewter, but aside from one flagon and a few tokens it is not represented here. One vessel which is peculiar to Scotland is the "quaigh", which is a deep saucer with two ears. It had a variety of uses, as a drinking vessel, for holding broth and porridge, and even in the church where it served to hold the Communion tokens. Two similar dishes may be seen in the east wall-case on the left.

In America the industry seems to have made little progress before the first half of the eighteenth century. The earliest products were oil lamps, tea, coffee and chocolate pots, measures and candlesticks. It is probable that a good deal of pewter was brought from England by the first colonists and that it served as models for the Colonial craftsmen. English moulds, too, were no doubt used for a time, and American measures, mugs and plates follow the English shapes. On plates, however, one seldom finds the hammer marks which show with such regularity on English chargers and dishes. Our craftsmen at first attempted very little decoration outside of simple mouldings; but

later when they did try to imitate elaborate silver shapes, they were far from successful.

There has never been any fixed standard of quality for American pewter and no regulations as to marking it. Most of it is unmarked, but a few examples of marked plates are shown in the desk case. These touches are much like the English ones and doubtless many of the first pewterers were men who had learned their craft in the old country. Very little is known of their lives, but by a diligent searching of old records some information may eventually be obtained as has been the case with colonial silversmiths. The names of about one hundred makers gathered from many sources have been added to this book.

From the Salem Court Record of February 1642 we get the name of perhaps the first pewterer, Richard Graves. And to Mrs. O. S. Paige of Taunton we are indebted for the following facts relating to the industry in that town. James Danforth set up a shop there about 1750, and twenty-five years later an Englishman named Richard Lee began to make pewter buttons. This was a new departure, and he is said to have supplied buttons to the Continental Army.

Joseph and Jireh Strange, the Porters, father and sons, also made pewter at the end of the eighteenth century, but Taunton is best known for its Britannia ware. Babbitt and Crossman, both of Taunton, started the industry there in 1824, being the first to make Britannia in the United States. A gravy spoon by their successors, Crossman, West and Leonard, is in the desk case. Henry G. Reed and Charles E. Barton, the founders of the Reed and Barton firm, revived the manufacture of pewter in 1847, making table ware, candlesticks, lamps and other objects of domestic use. Other American makers produced pewter for a short time after Britannia had become the fashion in the nineteenth century, and the same marks are found on both. But by then the use of it for household purposes had about ceased. Boston was always the centre of distribution for both the imported and the domestic product, and it is said that she supplied the whole section north of New York.

American Makers of Pewter and White Metal.

This list has been made up from exhibition and sales catalogues, from lists published in books on pewter, and from marked pieces of pewter.

Additions and corrections are solicited.

André, Michel	New York	1796
Austin, Richard	Boston	1796-1810
Austin, Nathaniel	"	b.1741,d.1816
Babbitt and Crossman	Taunton	1824
Badger, Thomas	Boston	1789-1810
Bancks, C.	Chelmsford ?	
Barnes, B. (or Barns).	Philadelphia	1811-19
Bassett, Francis	New York	1750-1799 ?
Bassett, Frederick	" "	1792-8
Bird, James	" "	1820
Boardman, Timothy and Co.	" "	1824
Boardman, Thos. D.	Hartford	After 1825
Boardman, T. D. and S.	"	1854
Boardman and Hart	New York	1828-1841?
Boyd, Parkes	Philadelphia ?	1800-12
Boyle, Robert	New York	1745-80
Bradford, Cornelius	Philadelphia	Before 1776

Bradford, William	New York	1750-80
Bumstead, Thomas	Boston	1654
Calder, William	Providence	1824
Clarke, Thomas	Boston	1683
Coldwell, George	New York	1792-1808 ?
Comer, John	Boston	1678
Crossman, West and Leonard	Taunton	After 1824
Cupen and Molineau	New York	About 1840
Danforth, James	Taunton	About 1745
Danforth, Samuel	Hartford	Early 19th cen.
Danforth, Thomas	Philadelphia	1807-13
Dolbeare, John	New Haven (?) and Boston	
Dunham, R.	Boston ?	19th cen.
Edgell, Simon	Philadelphia	1717-18
Elsworth, William I.	New York	1792
Everet, James	Philadelphia	1717-8
Estabrook		About 1820

Fields, Philip	New York	1799
Gleason, Roswell	Dorchester	1830
Graves, Richard	Boston and Salem	1639-42
Green, Andrew	Boston	1789-98
Green, Samuel	"	1798-1825
Green, Thomas	"	1789
Hale	New York ?	Early 19th cen.
Hamlin, Samuel E.	Providence	About 1824
Hamlin, William ?	"	b.1772, d.1869
Hart, Lucius	New York	1828
Heave, Christian	Philadelphia ?	Early 19th cen.
Hera (or Hero) C. and I.	Philadelphia	1810
Hero(?) Charlotte	"	1796
Holden, John	New York	1743
Homans and Co. (or Homan)	Cincinnati	About 1830
Hopper, H.		
Jackson, Mary	Boston	Early 19th cen.
Jones, G.	Providence	Late 18th cen.

Kirby, William	New York	1786-92
Knowles and Ladd		
Lafetra, Moses	New York	1812-16
Lafetra and Allaire	" "	1815-16
Leddel (?) James	" "	1744-80
Lee, Richard	Taunton	About 1770
Leonard, Reed and Barton	"	Est. 1835
Lock, D.	New York	After 1825
Locke, J. B.	" "	About 1830
McEwen, Malcolm and Son	New York	1794
Manning		1862
Melville, D.	Newport	
Michel, André	New York	1796
Padelford and Palenthorpe	Philadelphia	
Palethorp, Robert Jr.	"	Early 19th cen.
Parker, C.		
Pearse, Robert	New York	1792
Philip, Fields	" "	1799
Phillips, Thomas		About 1790

Pierce, Samuel		
Porter, Edmund	Taunton	
Porter, Edmund Jr.	"	After 1770
Porter, F,	Westbook, Me. Conn.	After 1825
Porter, Lincoln	Taunton	After 1770
Porter, Samuel	"	" "
Reed and Barton	Taunton	Est. 1845
Richardson, C.	Cranston, R. I.	Early 19th cen.
Richardson, George	Boston	1825
Rigden, Thomas	Philadelphia ?	Early 19th cen.
Roby, Joseph	Boston	1789
Shrimpton, Henry	Boston	1660-65
Skinner, John	"	1789-96
Strange, Joseph	Taunton	About 1880
Smith and Co.	Philadelphia ?	About 1830
Taunton Britannia Mfg. Co. (later Leonard, Reed and Barton)	Taunton	Est. 1830

Trask, Israel	Beverly	1825-42
Trask, Oliver		Early 19th cen.

Vose and Co.	Albany
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Welch, John (dealer?)	Boston	1796
Whitehouse, E.		Late 18th cen.
Wilds, Thomas	New York	1832-40
Will, George W.	Philadelphia	Early 19th cen.
Will, Henry	New York	1765-86
Will, William	Philadelphia	1796
Williams, L. L.	"	About 1830

Yale, H. and Co.	Wallingford, Conn.	
Youle, George	New York	1798-1821
Youle, Thomas	" "	1815-21
Youle, Thomas and Co.	" "	1811
Youle, Widow of Thomas	" "	1820-21

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